

Sermon for Last Sunday of the Church Year

Date: November 25, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Daniel 7:13-14

Epistle Reading: Jude 20-25

Gospel Reading: Mark 13:24-37

Sermon Text: Mark 13:24-37

Sermon Title: Wake Up!!



Introit: Psalm 39:4-5a, 7-8, 12a; Antiphon: 2 Peter 3:13b

Hymns:

LSB 549 – All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name (v. 1,2,5,6)

LSB 686 – Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (v. 1,3)

LSB 516 – Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

LSB 663 – Rise, My Soul, to Watch and Pray (v.1,5)

LSB 594 – God's Own Child, I Gladly Say It (v.1,4)

LSB 697 – Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death

Liturgy:

Divine Service: Prayer and Preaching



Pastor James Groleau
St. John's Lutheran Church
1200 13th Avenue NW
Austin, MN 55912
Office: (507) 433-2642
Shepherd@JamesPlace.net
StJohnsAustinLCMS.org
FaceBook.com/StJohnsAustin
Twitter.com@StJohnsAustinMN
FaceBook.com/Shepherd.James.Groleau



Text: Mark 13:24-37

²⁴ "Now, after the misery of those days, the sun will turn dark, the moon will not give light, ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the universe will be shaken. ²⁶ Then people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ He will send out his angels, and from every direction under the sky, they will gather those whom God has chosen.

²⁸ Learn from the story of the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and it sprouts leaves, you know summer is near. ²⁹ In the same way, when you see these things happen, you know that he is near, at the door. ³⁰ I can guarantee this truth: This generation will not disappear until all these things take place. ³¹ The earth and the heavens will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

³² No one knows when that day or hour will come. Even the angels in heaven and the Son don't know. Only the Father knows. ³³ Be careful! Watch! You don't know the exact time. ³⁴ It is like a man who went on a trip. As he left home, he put his servants in charge. He assigned work to each one and ordered the guard to be alert. ³⁵ Therefore, be alert, because you don't know when the owner of the house will return. It could be in the evening or at midnight or at dawn or in the morning. ³⁶ Make sure he doesn't come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ I'm telling everyone what I'm telling you: 'Be alert!'"

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Grace to you and peace in Jesus' name. Amen.

On this the Last Sunday of the Church Year, Jesus tells us "Be careful! Watch out!"¹ because faith can fade. No one becomes a Christian expecting to fall away, or expecting to stop going to church, or expecting to become weak in their faith.

Yet the sad reality is those things can and do happen. It's sad when what started out with such promise, ends with such sorrow. When instead of growing closer to our Savior we grow apart. Instead of growing into Christ we grow used to our Savior, take Him for granted, and begin to fall away.

Our prayers dwindle to nearly nothing. We do not read and feed our souls on His holy Word. He does not occupy any part of our day. In fact He occupies perhaps little more than an hour a week. We become "spiritual sofa spuds." or "couch potatoes for Christ." We let the world lull us into a lazy, 'I'll get to it later' attitude.

This is the "sleepiness" that Jesus is referring to in the Gospel reading for today. The spiritual stupor that can fall on Christians and can end in spiritual death. It is the greatest danger facing you in this world.

The greatest threat to you is not persecution, terrorism, bad health, economic collapse, or anything else. The greatest threat is to grow accustomed to your Savior and get bored with Him. It is to take your faith for granted. It is to think you don't need the Church, you don't need the Bible, and you can make it on your own. None of us expects that to happen to us... but it does. We would do well to think about what Jesus teaches us, "Be careful! Watch!"²

Now that's easier said than done, isn't it? Satan, the world, and our sinful self are all singing us a sinful lullaby, trying to lure us away from our Savior, and into the death of spiritual sleep. They are telling us to relax and take it easy. Whispering into our ears that our sins are not really important and not really so bad. Seducing us into thinking that we have plenty of time to make things right. Lulling us into thinking that the busyness of life that elbows out our reading of the Bible, and our prayers, is perfectly understandable. They tell us, "Those little sins, the subtle sins, the everyone-does-them sins... Don't let them bother your conscience! Sleep well good Christian. Sleep. Sleep in complacency. Sleep in security. Sleep."

It's happened to you, hasn't it? I know it has because it has happened to me at times. I know it has happened to you because there is no Christian whom Satan leaves alone! He knows how to get at each of us. The world keeps eating away at us. Our old sinful flesh just gets so tired of the struggle and the siren song³ of the lullaby sounds so sweet.

Today Jesus calls out to us four times, "Keep awake!" Do not go gentle into that spiritual night.⁴ Do not listen to the lying lullaby of Lucifer. Resist temptation and hate sin. Keep the commandments. Be constant and consistent in prayer. Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest those Sacred Holy Words.

1 Mark 13:32

2 Mark 13:32

3 In the books the 'The Iliad and the Odyssey' the Sirens are creatures, living on an island, that sing the most beautiful songs lulling sailors toward them where their ships are dashed on rocks just beneath the water.

4 Referencing a poem by Dylan Thomas called "Do Not go Gentle into That Good Night."

Remember your Baptism. Feed and strengthen your faith. Set your mind on things above. Lift up your heart to the Lord. Have mercy on others. Be steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.⁵ It is important! Because the Master of the house is returning and you do not know when.⁶

So there you go. Now you know what to do, but who among us is able to do all these things? That unholy trinity of Satan, the world, and our sinful flesh is too much for us. Satan is too sly, the world too wicked, and our sinful self too squishy! As hard as you try how many times have you fallen and failed? The truth is if our spiritual health, and our spiritual life depends on us we are lost eternally.

Now that's a mighty depressing message on which to end the year, but that's not all I have to say. We have Jude to listen as well. Did you hear what he said?

God can guard you so that you do not stumble, so that you can be full of joy, as you stand in his glorious presence without fault.⁷

There is One who is able where we are not. It is the One who kept Noah safe in the flood. The One who kept Abraham safe in the days of his pilgrimage. The One who freed Israel from slavery and brought them through the wilderness to the Promised Land, giving them Manna to eat and water from a rock to drink. The One who kept David from Goliath and Saul. The One who protected the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah. The One who kept Daniel safe from the lions. The One who kept Peter safe from his own fears and denials, and Thomas safe from his doubting. The One who even now keeps His Bride, the Church, safe against the gates of Hell, and the gaping jaws of false teaching and false doctrine.⁸ He is able!

He is not only able but has promised to give you life by His Word. Both physical and spiritual life by His powerful Word. By His Word which called all of creation into existence in the beginning. His Word which called Lazarus from the tomb. His Word which calls us from death to life in the waters of Holy Baptism. His Word which is able to keep us awake until He comes again. His Word of Law to correct and terrify us, and His Word of Gospel to comfort and forgive us. His Word which makes bread and wine His body and blood to feed us, forgive us, and strengthen us. His Word that tells us of our Savior's love, care, faithfulness and promise. He wants none to fall asleep. His desire is that none fall away. From the first to last, from the beginning to end, He wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.⁹

He gives His Word, and with His Word His life-giving Holy Spirit, to not only keep us awake, but also to keep us growing in Him. Grow into a mature strong Christian.

Your Savior knows that love, that deep love, that dying-on-the-cross-for-you love. He is the Bridegroom who laid down His life for His rebellious and unfaithful bride because in His love for you, He could do no less. His vow to us was not simply, "for better or for worse," or "till death do us part," but far greater! He knew "the worse," the sin, and so through His own death

5 1 Corinthians 15:58

6 Mark 13:35-36

7 Jude 24 (ESV)

8 Matthew 16:18

9 1 Timothy 2:4

and resurrection made sure that even death could not part us! Now, by grace through faith, we can live with Him forever, washed clean and made blameless by His love.

This is the Bridegroom who is returning for you! Not just a Bridegroom but a King. When that day will come none of us knows. Maybe it will be on the Last Day, the end of all things as we know them. Maybe it will be sooner than that. None of us knows but it really doesn't matter. You have the promise of Your Savior to keep you in life and in death. Your Savior who has given us the Divine Service for worship here each week to act as a kind of dress rehearsal for the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. Here your Bridegroom comes to you each week, forgiving you, feeding you, and keeping you, until one day we will, "enter all the Wedding Hall!"¹⁰ And what a day that will be!

Amen.